



## Dance: Grants Keep Miami Dancing

Step by step, Miami is getting the message out: Dance is to be had in this town, and it is good. Want proof? Visit the Miami Dances showcase this weekend, where you can see winners past and present of the Dance Miami Choreographers Fellowship Program.

Sponsored by Miami-Dade's Department of Cultural Affairs, the program provides grants to local professional choreographers. This year, a panel of renowned dance experts from across the country chose three winners that exemplify Miami's diversity and talent Miami: Augusto Soledade, artistic director of the Brazz Dance Theater company, which blends Afro-Brazilian and contemporary dance; Alexey Taran, artistic director of the experimental ERE.Bistoury company; and independent choreographer and Miami native Letty Bassart.

The fellowship, literally, can mean the difference between jumping for joy, or dragging one's meant-to-be-dancing feet. Just ask Soledade.

"It is an absolutely essential program in this county, and my understanding is that there are not too many of this kind throughout the country," says this three-time winner of the DMF grant, who originally established his company in Massachusetts in 1998, and moved it to South Florida in 2004 when he got hired by Florida International University as an assistant dance professor. Now, as FIU has scrapped its dance department, Soledade will no longer have a job there after this year, making the \$10,000 fellowship even more indispensable.

"Dance as a discipline survives on the generosity of supporters and grant programs," explains the Bahia native, now in his mid-40s. "The fellowship reflects an understanding of the costs that choreographers face in order to be able to produce any kind of dancing." Program director Adriana Pérez, the Projects Administrator for the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs who selects the panelists, agrees.

"Our mission is to have the artist create new works," says Pérez. Now in her third season in charge of the program which began in 2000. "The fellowship can allow dancers to attend dance conferences and meet and network with other dance companies nationwide and be able to start collaborations outside of Miami. And it helps them to just create, create, create."

### Panelists Point of View

"I was very impressed not only by the quality and the diversity of the artists, but also by the way the panel conducted the process and how it was organized by Miami-Dade," says New York panelist Gina Gibney, choreographer and artistic director of Gina Gibney Dance, a pioneer in taking dance to communities by



working with abused women and children and HIV patients. “It is very rare for a county, for a government entity, to create fellowships as these. The kind of trust that they put in the artists is unique.”

Although the panelists reviewed applicants with many different backgrounds and styles, there are certain elements that they must all share in order to be selected.

“When you look at a performer, is there a commitment to excellence? Is there a commitment to the art form as a whole? And then, within the structure, is what they’re showing of the creative strength that needs to be sponsored?” asks panelist Michael Uthoff, artistic and executive director of Dance St. Louis, Missouri. Originally from Chile, Uthoff is familiar with the local scene, thanks to working over the years with the New World School of the Arts and with the Dance Now! Ensemble.

Uthoff adds that no matter how creative the dance, it must connect with the audience. “Is this something that will bring more audiences to the theater, or will it basically make people run away and never come back?” he wonders. “Very often, grants are given to individuals who show a great deal of originality, and perhaps in three-years time, they will develop something that works for the theater. But right now, we need to focus on how do we fill those houses. That was the argument that we had.”

This year at least, the panel — which also included Aubrey Lynch, choreographer on Broadway and former dancer for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater — could not come up with a single answer for that argument. Instead they put their faith in three talents and made three awards.